

AGENDA: May 25, 2004

4.11

CATEGORY: Consent

DEPT.: Public Works

TITLE: High Speed Rail

RECOMMENDATION

Authorize the Mayor to send a letter to the Santa Clara County Cities Association and the California High Speed Rail Authority concurring with the Authority's findings recommending the Pacheco Pass and Diablo Pass alignments between the Central Valley and the Bay Area in the programmatic Draft Environmental Impact Report.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action; however, the cost to construct the proposed High Speed Rail project is estimated between \$33 billion and \$37 billion in 2003 dollars. The Authority, through the California State Legislature, placed a \$9 billion bond measure on the fall 2004 ballot to fund the engineering and construction of the system between Los Angeles and San Francisco; however, the Legislature is considering delaying placement of the initiative on the ballot until fall 2006 or 2008.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Established in 1996, the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) was formed to plan, design, construct and operate a high-speed train system, stretching from San Francisco, Oakland and Sacramento in the north to Los Angeles and San Diego in the south. According to the CHSRA, the system will use electric-powered high-speed train technology, similar to the high-speed trains used in Europe and Japan, traveling at speeds exceeding 200 mph and carrying up to 68 million passengers per year by 2020. Trains would travel near existing rail or highways and connect to major airports. In the Bay Area, the High Speed Rail would travel along the existing Caltrain line, requiring the project to four-track, grade-separate all at-grade crossings and electrify the Caltrain corridor. Total travel time between San Jose and Los Angeles is estimated at 2 hours and 52 minutes.

In 2001, the CHSRA began to study the environmental impacts of this proposed project and earlier this year, the draft Program Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) was released to analyze the environmental impacts of the project at the program level. Attachment 1 to this report contains a summary of the DEIR.

Following the release of the DEIR, the Santa Clara County Cities Association requested each city concur with the CHSRA's findings in regard to the alignment options posed in the DEIR, specifically the rejection of the Altamont Pass alignment.

The recommended alignment options in the DEIR are the Pacheco Pass alignment, which would travel along the Pacheco Pass highway corridor, and the Diablo alignment, which would travel through the Diablo Mountain Range near Mount Hamilton through a series of tunnels. Both alignments would lead to San Jose, and trains would then travel to either the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco or Oakland along existing rail corridors. According to the DEIR, these alignments have the least environmental impact and greatest operational efficiency.

The rejected Altamont Pass alignment would travel through the Altamont Pass along or near the existing Altamont Commuter Express/Union Pacific rail line, terminating in Union City, with a three-way split to Oakland, San Jose and across the Bay and up the Peninsula to the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco.

The Sierra Club and other groups believe the Altamont Pass alignment would put the High Speed Rail along a more heavily populated corridor, while the southern alignments would encourage growth in sparsely populated areas. However, High Speed Rail is designed to be a point-to-point service, traveling from Los Angeles to the Bay Area without stopping. Although some limited stop service is being considered, the High Speed Rail would in no way function as a commuter rail line to serve the communities along the Altamont Pass route.

The Altamont alignment would also necessitate the construction of a new double-track rail bridge over the San Francisco Bay for trains to travel up the Peninsula to the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco. This alignment would result in significant impacts to wetland habitats as the approaches to the bridge would necessitate filling in portions of the Bay. Again, the Sierra Club states the Dumbarton Rail Bridge could be used; however, this Bridge is a single-track, swing bridge able to support only limited rail service, far below the level of service projected for High Speed Rail.

The CHSRA has adequately demonstrated the operational and environmental concerns surrounding the Altamont Pass alignment and recommends concurrence with their findings rejecting the Altamont Pass alignment as a possible option.

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, the City of San Jose, the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group and the San Jose/Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce have all written in support of the CHSRA's findings. Copies of these letters are included in Attachment 2.

AGENDA: May 25, 2004

PAGE: 3

PUBLIC NOTICING – Agenda posting.

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PS/8/CAM
904-05-25-04M-E^

Attachments: 1. Draft Program Environmental Impact Report Summary
2. Letters

cc: California High Speed Rail Authority

Santa Clara County Cities Association

TPM, SAA – Skinner, F/c